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AUTHOR Reganick, Karol A.
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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature and analysis looks at the concept of full inclusion of students with disabilities in the context of the regular education initiative (REI). The concept of full inclusion is explained as the use of new methods, techniques, and strategies to teach students with and without disabilities in the same classroom. Identification of assumptions underlying the issue precede specific arguments both for and against full inclusion. An analysis of the validity of both sets of arguments considers attitudes of educators, parents, and students. Next, the paper looks at values emphasized and compromised by the full inclusion model such as increased emphasis on cooperative learning and social development and possible compromises in the values of educational excellence and efficiency. The paper concludes that full inclusion is the preferred condition but should not be the only possibility. Also stressed is the importance of specialists, classroom teachers, parents, and students all participating in student program development and decision making. (Contains 212 references.) (DB)

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Full Inclusion: Analysis of a
Controversial Issue

Karol A. Reganick

Nova University

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Overview/Definition of the Issue

Under the regular education initiative (REI) umbrella, popular terms such as: mainstreaming, integration, desegregation, least restrictive environment, and full inclusion are used by educators to describe various reform stages. The concept of full inclusion combines new methods, techniques, and strategies for teaching students with and without disabilities in the same classroom. A rather moderate view of the REI philosophy may have three different interpretations: (a) the education of students with mild or moderate disabilities taking place in a regular education setting; (b) regular classroom teachers and resource specialists collaborating on the development and implementation of treatment programs; and (c) if satisfactory student progress is not being observed by a diverse population in the regular classroom setting, then interventions conducted in special education settings may be tested and evaluated against student outcomes in regular education settings (Jenkins & Pious, 1991).

Robert R. Davila, from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, suggests that an inclusive environment is one where no child or adult will be absent in terms of the benefits that result from interactions with non-disabled peers. For some, REI is a code word for either full inclusion or the elimination of special education. Jenkins and Pious (1991) agree that there is a legitimate diversity of viewpoints associated with the definition of REI, which would substantiate the need for further debate.

Assumptions Underlying the Issue

A growing number of schools and districts across the United States are moving in the direction of welcoming all children regardless of their learning, physical, or emotional characteristics as full members of their school communities (Davern & Schnorr, 1991). While some researchers insist on the inclusion of all students with disabilities, (McDonnell, 1987; Thousand & Villa 1990) others are more cautious regarding the integration of students with severe and multiple disabilities into regular education programs (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1990).

Teachers , parents, and students have concerns of their own regarding full inclusion. Teachers worry

about the quality of education for the handicapped and nonhandicapped students in full inclusion classes (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993). Parents of children with disabilities are concerned with the appropriateness of their child's education and the acceptance of their children by nondisabled peers (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989; McDonnell 1987). Disabled students are most concerned with being stigmatized by their peers as being different or inferior (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989).

Public Law 94-142 has had a tremendous impact on the education of children with handicaps. It established an entitlement to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (McDonnell, 1987). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, clearly specifies that placement of any student must be based upon the student's identified needs, not the student's handicapping condition or categorical label. The question of whether regular class placement is appropriate for a category of learners assumes that placement can be made based upon handicapping condition without documentation of individual needs, and an examination of whether those

needs could be met in a regular class setting (Thousand & Villa, 1990).

Reynolds, Wang and Walberg (1987), agree that unless major structural changes are made, the field of special education is destined to become more of a problem and less of a solution in providing education for children who have special needs. Although there are many arguments for and against full inclusion, the most intense are those regarding the inclusion of students with severe handicapping conditions, (Diamond, 1993; Jenkins et al., 1990; Reynolds et al., 1987) and the preparation time needed for full inclusion (Jenkins & Pious, 1991).

Arguments For

Proponents of full inclusion point out that a growing number of districts no longer provide a special class model, and students with severe disabilities are being given general education placements (Thousand & Villa, 1990). Wang and Walberg (1988) believe that special education does nothing but take students from general education and place them in small, segregated classes where they receive a watered-down curriculum in a shorter time frame. The literature provides no solid

scientific or moral basis to continue segregating students with special needs.

York and Vandercook (1991) believe full inclusion will provide students with severe disabilities the social adjustment necessary for good citizenship. In the context of regular classes, extra-curricular activities, and other age appropriate environments, students learn social competencies in addition to core curriculum content. By attending school together, students with and without disabilities gain values, attitudes, and skills necessary to achieve interdependence as society members (York & Vandercook, 1991). Research indicates that full inclusion positively influences the attitudes of nonhandicapped students about their handicapped peers in addition to enhancing their relationships. Full inclusion increases the educational development of handicapped students (McDonnell, 1987).

The majority of students in our public schools learn powerful lessons when students with special needs are separated from them. Because regular education students rarely interact with special students, they perceive them to be inadequate, substandard, and pitiful. Davern and Schnorr (1991) report that if we

want graduates who will welcome others, regardless of their learning, physical or emotional characteristics, as neighbors, co-workers and friends; daily shared experiences among students will be essential.

According to Reynolds et al. (1987) the research data clearly cannot justify the present structure of many special education programs being offered to mildly and moderately handicapped children. School districts have thoroughly justified these programs as they were being launched. Each program was a separate entity with its own eligibility, accountability, funding, and advocacy system. The result has been extreme disjointedness, which leads to excesses of proceduralism, including the tedious, costly, and scientifically questionable categorizing of students and programs (Reynolds et al., 1987).

Proponents of full inclusion insist that many students in special education are spuriously classified and may be receiving inferior services and, in some cases, injurious labeling and stereotyping (Wang & Walberg, 1988). In many circumstances, the current system has not been an adequate resource for students with learning problems. Currently, children with special needs are being segregated based on

scientifically indefensible and invidious classifications, presuming that students rather than learning environments are at fault (Wang & Walberg, 1988). Perhaps the two most significant reasons for the continuation of the current system is: (1) systemic changes take time; and (2) change happens only if people have models to observe, visit, and imitate. Thousand and Villa (1990) propose that a united advocacy effort be made to promulgate national policy prohibiting segregated education for any youngster entering school in the 21st century.

Arguments Against

There is much disagreement within the field as to whether students with intensive educational needs belong in general education classrooms, special education classrooms, or be given instruction at home. Jenkins et al. (1990) believe that students with intensive educational needs should be excluded from the full inclusion proposal, because their needs extend beyond the general curriculum that the teacher is responsible for. There are severely disabled students who cannot be accommodated in our current public educational systems; as they would be ineffectively instructed in such settings, or would be so disruptive

that their inclusion would be detrimental to other children (Diamond, 1993). Supporters of special education argue that the quality and intensity of services provided in special settings, by special educators, are superior to those provided in full inclusion settings (McDonnell, 1987). Polloway (1984) argues that special schools are more efficient, offer higher quality services, provide facilitation for the availability of auxiliary services, and students experience a sense of security.

Jenkins and Pious (1991) express concern for the teachers with full inclusion classrooms arguing that many are neither able nor want to accept the responsibility of children with special needs, claiming the regular classroom poses challenges that are too daunting. Diamond (1993) believes many children with special needs who must attend schools with full inclusion programs will withdraw into themselves being not just segregated, but totally isolated. The differences among students must be considered when examining the least restrictive environment. It should be viewed as a continuum of variability unique to the proper placement of each student. According to Hamre-Nietupski, McDonald and Nietupski (1992), the placement

for the profound, and/or multiple disabled students should remain open with practitioners and researchers who will empirically place them in the proper instructional setting.

Analysis of Validity of Arguments

In a recent study conducted by Giangreco et al. (1993) students with severe disabilities were assigned to regular education classrooms. Nineteen teachers reluctantly agreed to participate in the program. Some teachers were cautious, others were negative about having one student with special needs in their classroom. Teachers agreed to take these students contingent upon receipt of supports such as specialized resource professionals and classroom aides. Far into the school year; 17 teachers experienced a willingness to interact with the student, learn additional skills that would benefit the student, and accept the student as a valuable member of the class.

According to Giangreco et al. (1993), the teachers reported that the students with severe disabilities experienced improvement in awareness and responsiveness to teachers, peers, and support staff. In addition, the students learned a variety of communication, social, motor, academic, and other skills that enhanced

participation in home, school, and community activities. The regular education students reported having a heightened awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. The majority of regular students accepted their presence and were nonchalant about it.

Many educators perceive full inclusion as a positive change in education, but the concept is very stressful for many parents (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). McDonnell (1987) surveyed 400 parents of students with handicaps. Fifty percent of those parents expressed concerns of verbal abuse, physical abuse, resentment, and other mistreatment from nondisabled peers in a regular school setting; however, only a minimal amount of mistreatment cases were actually reported (McDonnell, 1987). Parents of students with disabilities expressed fears that their children would be isolated from other disabled peers, and would not have any friends while being educated in a regular setting, in addition to not receiving help from the teacher or being accepted into extracurricular activities. They continued to worry that their children's overall quality of education would decrease as would the availability of special services. McDonnell (1987) claims that parent concerns proved to

be unwarranted except for a few isolated cases. However, a significant number of parents reported a loss of speech, language, physical therapy, and occupational therapy services.

Hanline and Halvorsen (1989) interviewed the parents of fourteen students with disabilities to determine if support services were continuing during full inclusion. Parents commented that the support services were adequate, however, the primary benefit of full inclusion was social skill development. The program produced a positive impact on their child's self-esteem, therefore, parents could now expect more independence from their children which decreased family tension. Davern and Schnorr (1991) proclaim that parents of students with disabilities and the school staff involved in full inclusion programs believe that inclusion will increase student development in the following three areas: (a) language and communication, (b) social skills, and (c) friendship building.

In order to discover the student's preference for service delivery of various programs, Jenkins and Heinen (1989) interviewed mildly handicapped, remedial, and regular education students. They preferred to receive special instruction from their regular

classroom teacher. If that was not possible, they wanted to be taken from class if they were to receive instruction from the specialist.

Students viewed help from the regular class teacher as less stigmatizing than help from a specialist. Embarrassment played a substantial role in the student's choice of delivery models. Jenkins and Heinen (1989) also discovered that student perceptions of stigmatization were extremely personal. For example, although students may view a particular service delivery mode as preferable for themselves, they appear not to differentially judge others according to service mode. The study was significant in that student responses contradicted the beliefs of educators. The majority of students would be inclined toward a program of full inclusion (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbraum, 1988).

Values Emphasized and Compromised

Values of excellence, efficiency, equity, and liberty will be challenged, as more people take a stand on the controversial issue of full inclusion. Educators who represent organizations such as The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps believe that separate education is inherently unequal, and

erecting barriers between students based solely on their differences in ability and achievement, cannot be justified. Thus, education is defined by the walls of the classroom (Jenkins & Pious, 1991).

Students with severe disabilities need a functional curriculum which involves life skills. These skills are rarely taught in regular education. Teaching these skills in a regular education class may challenge the efficiency and excellence of instruction. Hamre-Nietupski et al. (1992) suggest three strategies to overcome this challenge: (a) peers can provide assistance, (b) instruct these skills during cooperative learning times, and (c) remove the student from the class for specialized instruction. The values of equity and liberty may be challenged in a partially inclusive program where the student with severe disabilities is assigned to a regular class, but attends a specialized class for half the day to receive functional skill instruction (Lipsley & Gartner, 1989).

Baker and Zigmond (1990) suggest that educators need not change the curriculum for students with learning disabilities, rather change the way it is taught. In order to provide equity and accommodate the child with special needs, teachers need to increase the

percentage of time they devote to teaching, and use a wider range of techniques. Teaching activities may need to include more interactive tasks that involve students in the learning process. Cooperative learning strategies which includes analyzing peer group dynamics for optimum student achievement, may enhance the equity of education for all students.

Another major area of concern for students with disabilities is social development. According to Hamre-Neitupski et al. (1992) social integration and friendships between students with and without disabilities do not occur simply through integrated physical placement, but must be facilitated. If schools are establishing a philosophy of individual achievement through group activity, then teachers and administrators need to consider integrating cooperative social interaction into the curriculum. Social interaction may be promoted by cooperative learning, student collaboration, and after school activities open to all students. Teachers are also encouraged to treat students with disabilities as normal as possible and reward peers and faculty when equity is being advocated. Parents of disabled children should encourage their child's participation in

extracurricular activities, in addition to promoting social relationships with a sensitivity to their child's development (Hamre-Nietupski et al. 1991). Gaylord-Ross (1989) suggests that opportunities alone may not result in skilled behavior, and that teaching social skills should be no different than teaching other curriculum areas.

The process of full inclusion may differ from teacher to teacher, but if we propagate quality education, emphasize values, and collaborate as professionals, the product (our children's development) will continually improve. To achieve inclusive schools, special and regular educators must come together if they are to attain goals of effective and appropriate education for every student (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Reynolds et al. (1987) proposes an establishment of new partnerships in education; partnerships between states and federal government, between states and local districts, between regular and special educators, and between educators and parents.

My Personal Position on the Issue

The restructuring of schools already has begun. Ad hoc collaborative problem-solving and teaching teams composed of adults and students currently are emerging

across North America in support of schools designated for full inclusion (Thousand & Villa, 1990). The future implies the existence of a total program for all handicapped children within the public school system of our country (Diamond, 1993). The educational journey for students with mild to moderate handicaps has nearly come full circle. A journey which began in regular education, gradually shifted toward special education, and now is returning to the regular classroom again (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). There has been a slow, yet progressive inclusion of those students labeled severely impaired (Lipsley & Gartner, 1989).

While the future seems to be apparent to many, some disagree as to the appropriateness of student placement. Thousand and Villa (1990) encourage an end to discussions of whether students labeled handicapped can or should be educated. The concept of full inclusion programs may be realized in all American schools by the year 2000. Therefore, the discussion should focus on the documentation, refinement, and dissemination of instructional, organizational, and technological innovations that allow neighborhood schools to respond to the diverse needs of the learner. Jenkins and Pious (1991) suggest that handicapped

students attend effective programs where they have the opportunity to maximize their potential. In many schools, disability automatically results in separate education which may violate student rights, compromise values, and impede student development.

After working with special needs students for many years, I have seen significant improvement in students resulting in their attendance of special classes. They were given the individual attention they needed for optimum development. I also know many students who dropped out of school because they were not given the opportunity to attend a regular class. These students and their parents feared being stigmatized by society as inferior. I know of parents who will enlist their children in private schools claiming that their children will not receive the education needed to attend schools of higher learning should full inclusion be instituted. I view full inclusion as a preferred condition, but not as the only possibility. Taking an extreme position either way often does not coincide with the reality of the student's needs. Reducing and eventually ending separate education may be an important goal, but not to the devaluation of existing programs. During this crucial time of restructuring,

schools must collaboratively plan and create programs in which students with special needs are welcome and successful.

Since few of us are in agreement with what REI really means, I propose that educators begin the full inclusion process by creating a philosophy which recognizes the need for specialists and classroom teachers to participate equally in analyzing student learning and proposing modifications. People directly involved with students should be empowered to solve problems related to their achievement and development (Jenkins & Pious, 1991). Professionals, community members, parents, and students will form teams to decide what accommodations will be necessary in these extremely heterogeneous classrooms. Schools destined for full inclusion should be ethical, democratic communities where justice prevails, equity is cherished, integrity is a driving force in all relationships, participation by all is expected, resources are distributed equally, and members are allowed to submit grievances (Calabrese, 1990).

Arguing for the validity and necessity of full inclusion may be a pointless issue at this time. Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) remind us that

demographic indicators are suggesting that the population of children entering our public schools is changing dramatically. There is also a local and national enthusiasm being generated about school vouchers and parental choice which forces us to question the existence of public schools in the future.

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